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### HUNT BLOG NEWSLETTER

15 DECEMBER 2017

#### AUSTRALIAN SHEEP PRODUCERS LED LIKE LAMBS TO THE SLAUGHTER

When Huntblog was growing up in the northwest of NSW in 1950's, Australia was riding on the sheep's back. Wool sold for a pound a pound and we lived in a representative democracy. Federal Parliamentarians were elected by adult Australian citizens from a number of candidates running for office in different electorates spread across Australia and our State Parliamentarians and Local Government Councillors were elected on a similar basis.

Importantly, in those times, all (or nearly all) the NSW wool and sheep producers belonged to the Graziers Association and the elected President and Secretary of the local Graziers Association branch represented our local area at the District level and the elected District Graziers Association President and Secretary represented our District at the Regional level and the elected Regional President and Secretary headed off to Sydney to represent the Region at the State Graziers Association conference. The elected President and Secretary of each State Graziers Association then headed to Canberra for the Federal Graziers association conference and to lobby the federal politicians.

However, as Bob Dylan so famously sang in the 1960's, *The Times They are A-Changing* and by the 1990s when the current red meat industry organisational structures were put in place NSW Farmers had just over 25,000 members and the other States had relatively similar numbers. Consequently, the State Farmer Organisation based Sheep Meat Council and the Cattle Council of Australia had sufficient funding from membership fees to carry out their functions under the Red Meat Industry Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Fast forward to 2017 and NSW Farmers has just over 5,000 members and the equivalent SFO bodies in the other States have had similar declines in membership numbers. In the result, the SFO-based red meat industry representative Peak Councils no longer represent the vast majority of their constituents and they do not have the money to carry out their functions under the current organisational structures.

Sadly, this November the Sheep Meat Council responded to the challenge of its times by walking away from representative democracy and morphing itself from an SFO Incorporated Association to an SFO Company Limited by Guarantee and rebadged itself – Sheep Producers Australia Limited. A rebadged SFO company with a special qualification board comprising seven people selected by an SFO appointed

Selection Committee with the right for Sheep Producer Australia's members to endorse the Selection Committee's nominees.

Sheep Producers Australia's role under the current red meat industry structure is to represent all Australia's sheep producers, lobby Government on their behalf, and instruct and supervise the service company Meat & Livestock Australia's (MLA's) expenditure of sheep producer levies.

But how can a special qualification board appointed and anointed by an SFO Selection Committee whose continuing falling membership base comprises less than 20% of Australia's sheep producers represent the majority of Australian sheep producers?

Since whence did representative democracy rely on 'appointed' representatives? How can an 'appointed' delegate claim to have the ear of grass roots constituents?

Representative democracy relies on representatives elected by the relevant constituents to represent them. Representatives that truly represent the voice of their people.

Boffins and special qualification board members may have a place in an operational Company – but how can they have a role in a representative, '*voice of the people*', advocacy body?

So where to now for a representative voice for sheep producers? How do grass roots non-SFO member sheep producers ever achieve a voice over how their levies are spent? Their levies are paid to the operational service company MLA whose board is selected by a selection committee and rubber stamped by MLA sheep and cattle producer members. Yet, under the MOU, Sheep Producers Australia Limited, whose board is also selected by a selection committee and rubber stamped by the few members that it has, are meant to direct and supervise MLA's expenditure sheep levy expenditure.

To take away the ability of a people to elect representatives is to step away from representative democracy and toward an Orwellian future that is anathema to our Australian values. Members of the other rural industry sectors should be on guard to make sure that they do not suffer the same fate.

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